

Living Ashura in Lebanon: Mourning Transformed to Sacrifice

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The slogans of Karbala are the slogans of life in its entirety. . . . Living Ashura is standing against oppression. Such a stand should fill our hearts and minds each time we face the oppressors and arrogant powers, whether in Muslim countries or in the whole world. It is not living in a tragedy of tears and hitting ourselves with swords or chains . . . for swords should be raised against the enemy as we were taught by the Imam (a.s).
—Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah, sermon commemorating the fortieth memorial of Imam Husayn, 2003

As Hajjeh Rula began to narrate the final moments Husayn spent with his eldest son before they both met their deaths, sobs rose heavily around us, filling the room with palpable grief. Her voice cracked as she lamented poetry into her microphone, describing how Husayn looked upon his son, who had come to him for his final blessing. This mournful parting was followed by an all-too-vivid description of the son's death and how the enemy cut up his body with their swords, mutilating it, Hajjeh Rula repeating those details about the swords cutting his body over and over again, weaving in foreshadowings of Husayn's death that was soon to follow, and bringing the sounds of weeping in the room to a crescendo. Then she paused. After waiting a moment for the sobs to subside, she began a lecture, in which she explained very clearly what the Quran, the hadith, and the hadith of Imam Ali all say about love and responsibility in parent-child relationships. Another pause, and the tears returned to their place in her voice. Taking up her poetic narration, she described the love of a parent for a child and the love of a sister for a brother, and then focused her last lamenting breaths on Zaynab. Zaynab, who looked upon the mutilated corpses from the battle as though she were the sister of each, the mother of each, with all the horrific emotion of a grieving woman looking upon her martyred son or brother, a grief probably far too real for many in the room.
—Field notes, 10 April 2000

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Ashura—as Lebanese metonymically refer to the first ten days of Muharram[1]—is the Shi'i Muslim commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third Shi'i Imam. Husayn's death at Karbala in 680

This article is based primarily, though not exclusively, on field research conducted from October 1999 through July 2001 in a Lebanese Shi'i community located in a Hizbullah-dominated area of the southern suburbs of Beirut. This is a community where people are religiously active, praying, fasting, and tithing regularly, and where many explicitly embrace either "Shi'i" or "Muslim" as a part of their identity. My field research was made possible by a Social Science Research Council International Dissertation Field Research Fellowship, a National Science Foundation Dissertation Research Fellowship, a grant from Emory University's Internationalization Fund, and a PEO Scholar Award. The Center for Behavioral Research under Dr. Samir Khalaf provided an academic home in Beirut. I am grateful to Donald L. Donham, Mary Elaine Hegland, Bruce Knauft, and Corinne Kratz for their valuable feedback. Finally, my greatest gratitude is reserved for the many women and men in Lebanon who shared such an important part of their lives with me and who continue to do so.

1. *Ashura* (from the Arabic root that means "ten") is technically the term for the tenth of the month, the day on which the battle

CE—along with all his companions except one sick son—marks a moment of increased fissure in the Muslim community, often pointed to by Shi'i Muslims today as the decisive root of their separate identity.[2] The rituals associated with Ashura commemorate both a battle of righteousness against corruption and a key moment in Shi'i history—a moment so powerful that subsequent moments were characterized by an "overriding paradigm of persecution, exclusion, and suffering."[3] Indeed, both scholars and Shi'i Muslims themselves frequently understand Ashura to be an essential cultural paradigm for Shi'ism.[4] The shared narratives, meanings, and practices associated with Ashura are crucial to the construction of collective Shi'i identity.[5]

In Lebanon, Ashura commemorations have undergone a transformation in recent decades, from a ritual focused on mourning to one highlighting Islamic activism. This transformation accompanied the Lebanese Shi'i Islamic mobilization that began in the late 1960s.[6] Motivated in part by the marginalized position of many Shi'is in the Lebanese nation-state, this movement involved multiple strains and was continually catalyzed by a series of events, most notably the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon that ended in May 2000. One key aspect of the movement was an emphasis on religious reform, much of which was focused around Ashura, and especially the explicit linking of the Ashura history to a contemporary activist discourse. In what follows, I describe both the transformation of the ritual commemorations and these shifts in meaning. I suggest that a crucial part of these changes is the emphasis on an idealized role model for piety—represented by Husayn for Shi'i men and by his sister Zaynab for Shi'i women.[7]

Zaynab, along with other women and children of Husayn's family, had accompanied her brother to Karbala. After all the men were killed, the women and children were taken into captivity, and Zaynab was their leader until Husayn's sole heir was able to take his place. In the transformation of Ashura commemorations, Zaynab's behavior has been reinterpreted to underscore the activist elements in her role and character. As Ashura is applied to contemporary life, pious Shi'i women's emulation of Zaynab as an activist rather than a passive mourner is especially significant, because it is reflected in a major shift in the levels of women's public participation in this particular community in Lebanon. While Husayn provides a model for sacrifice in blood for men, Zaynab represents sacrifice in sweat for women. I will return to this at the conclusion of this article to consider how changes in Ashura and especially these idealized models for pious behavior have been brought to bear on the lives of pious Shi'i women and men in Lebanon, and how the Ashura paradigm is lived today.

Commemorations Transformed

Commemorating Ashura in Lebanon involves holding and attending both private and public *majalis*, or mourning gatherings, in which the history of the martyrdom is retold, and tenth-day *masirat*, or lamentation processions, during which men often perform *latam*, a ritualized

at Karbala took place, but Lebanese Shi'a use "Ashura" to refer to the entire ten-day commemoration period.

2. Husayn was killed by troops sent by the Caliph Yazid, solidifying an already existing rift over leadership of the Muslim community between those who followed the Caliphate and those who believed that Muhammad had desired hereditary leadership after his death, through the Imams.

3. David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 56.

4. Michael Fischer calls this the "Karbala paradigm"; see Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). Discussions of the practice of Shi'ism often focus on Muharram mourning rituals. For obvious reasons, Iran has been a particular geographic focus of these studies, followed recently by South Asia, as well as Lebanon, Iraq, and North America.

5. This is intensified by the drama and emotional intensity of the commemorations. Studies of ethnic violence have noted the importance of drama and, particularly, calendrical dates with salient historical value in mobilizing collective identities at specific moments. See Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

6. By Lebanese Shi'i Islamic mobilization or movement, I mean the strains of Shi'i Islamic activism that began with Sayyid Musa al-Sadr in the 1960s and continued after his disappearance under the leadership/organization of Harakat Amal, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah, Hizbullah, and others.

7. It is crucial to note that this is one of the models for piety, Islamic reform, and Ashura commemoration among Lebanese Shi'i Muslims. There is no uniform "Lebanese Shi'i community." My focus in this article is on those Shi'i Lebanese who are supporters of Hizbullah or followers of Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah (one of the most prominent contemporary Lebanese Shi'i religious leaders). Indeed, it is their shared notions of religious reform and shared understandings of piety that hold this "community" together. See Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety among Islamist Shi'i Muslims in Beirut* (PhD diss., Emory University, 2003).

striking of one's body in grief.[8] Both the structure and the meaning of Ashura and these lamentation events have always been historically fluid, incorporating different elements in different locales and reflecting the changing political and social status of the Lebanese Shi'a. However, the recent reform-based changes that have been taking place in Lebanon are conceptualized as particularly dramatic. A shift can be discerned from commemorative forms that my interlocutors label "traditional" to those that they consider to be more authentic. I refer to these new forms as "authenticated" and to this shift as "authentication"—a continual process of labeling particular practices and beliefs "traditional" (*taqlidi*), and distancing from them, embracing in their stead practices and beliefs that are considered "true" (*haqiqi*) or "correct" (*sahih*).[9]

Ashura commemorations similar to the contemporary type of commemoration that my interlocutors label "traditional" have occurred in various forms in rural Lebanon and in what is today the southern suburbs of Beirut since the beginning of the century.[10] Several elements characterize these traditional commemorations, including self-flagellation that draws blood during *latam* and a focus on grief (expressed in weeping by both sexes) and regret rather than activism.[11] The earliest written evidence of a clerical effort to reform these practices—particularly that of self-injurious *latam*—dates from the late 1920s.[12] At that time Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, a religious scholar from Jabal 'Amil (south Lebanon) who led a Shi'i community in Damascus, criticized self-injurious *latam* as unlawful.[13] This set off a virulent debate between al-Amin and the few scholars who agreed with him, and the major sayyid families of Jabal 'Amil who formed a religious and landowning elite. In the end, the elite sayyid families succeeded in rallying the majority of uneducated villagers against al-Amin's calls for reform.[14]

The important point here for our purposes is that while the issue of the lawfulness of self-injurious *latam* in Ashura commemorations became a major debate among Shi'i religious scholars in Jabal 'Amil, Damascus, and Najaf in the 1920s, the issue did not attract popular support or interest at that time. Decades later, as Shi'i Muslims began to migrate to Beirut, they brought this traditional form of commemoration with them.

The urban visibility of Ashura grew in tandem with the rapid urbanization of the Shi'i population that took place in Lebanon in the 1950s and 1960s. Many nonparticipants viewed the commemorations as a frightening display of the "backward" (*mutakhallif*) traditions of Shi'i Muslims.[15] For Lebanese Shi'is, this stigma followed on a history marked by political and

8. For history of the Ashura mourning rituals, see Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978); Yitzhak Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of 'Ashura," *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 161–81; and Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner, 1997).

9. This is related to the self-conscious systematization of Islam that Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori call "objectification." See Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). I use the term *authentication* because it captures my interlocutors' emphases on textual and historical accuracy while hinting at both cultural authenticity and the idea of being true to one's self.

10. While some Lebanese Shi'is held *majalis* in their homes and otherwise commemorated Ashura throughout their history, the practice of injurious self-flagellation during *latam* was brought to southern Lebanon from Iran in the early part of the twentieth century or latter part of the nineteenth. See Werner Ende, "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite 'Ulama,'" *Der Islam* 55 (1978): 19–36. Commemorations considered "traditional" still take place in many parts of Lebanon, especially in the southern town of Nabatieh.

11. The prevalence of weeping among men and women alike contrasts with Lila Abu-Lughod's observations about the gender differences in discourses about death and in lamentations in the (Sunni) Awlad Ali Bedouin community. See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993): 187–205.

12. Ende, "Flagellations of Muharram."

13. Ende also notes that there were other religious scholars who put forth similar views around the same time ("Flagellations of Muharram").

14. Ende suggests a number of reasons for the hostility of the religious establishment to al-Amin's reformist views, including that the Ashura commemorations worked to reinforce the allegiance of the peasantry and uneducated villagers to the sayyid families, so it was to the latter's advantage to maintain the commemorations as they were ("Flagellations of Muharram"). He also suggests economic factors, because the commemorations drew crowds from the surrounding areas. Indeed, a friend of mine, a "secular Shi'i" from the Jabal 'Amil area, supports the traditional commemorations despite her atheism because she believes they are necessary for the economic welfare of her hometown.

15. It is difficult to ascertain who participated in these traditional Ashura commemorations. Nonparticipants include non-Shi'i Lebanese, though political leaders would sometimes attend a commemoration held at the home of a prominent Shi'i elite, and Emrys Peters suggests the participation of Christian villagers in commemorations in one Lebanese village in the early 1950s in "A Muslim Passion Play: Key to a Lebanese Village," *Atlantic Monthly* 198 (1956): 176–80. Nonparticipants also include Shi'i Lebanese who did not commemorate Ashura; I hesitate to call them nonreligious Shi'a because that would require a longer discussion of the multiple valences of being *mutadayyin* (religious).

economic marginalization: in a nation-state where sectarian political-economic power translated to selective access to modernization for particular areas of the country, the Shi'a resided primarily in the least-developed rural regions and did not have access to infrastructural and institutional developments occurring in the rest of Lebanon.[16]

Despite the earlier attempts at reform, and the stigmatization of the commemorations in the urban milieu, it was not until the 1980s that strong opposition to traditional forms of Ashura appeared among Shi'i Muslims who were not religious scholars. The first signs of this came in 1974, just after Musa al-Sadr founded the "Movement of the Deprived," planting the initial seeds of the Lebanese Shi'i Islamic movement. Augustus Richard Norton notes that "under Imam Musa's considerable influence, religious commemorations became vehicles for building communal solidarity and political consciousness."[17] However, while al-Sadr was the first to link contemporary Shi'i political mobilization in Lebanon with Ashura,[18] practical large-scale transformation of the ritual in both practice and meaning did not take root for another decade.

Around that time the Lebanese civil war (1975–90) along with three key factors catalyzed the then nascent Shi'i Islamic movement and prompted the formation of Hizbullah:[19] the 1978 and 1982 Israeli invasions of Lebanon and the subsequent occupation of southern Lebanon until May 2000; the 1978 disappearance of al-Sadr;[20] and the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Concurrent with these events, widespread opposition to traditional forms of commemorating Ashura began to emerge among pious Shi'i Muslims. This opposition reflected trends in Iran, where reformist and Islamic intellectuals had contributed to the emergence of a new Ashura discourse that linked it to an alternative and revolutionary Shi'ism, in contrast to a politically quietist one.[21]

Crucially, this time the debates about the commemorations in Lebanon were not confined to the religious leadership. Debate among religious scholars is not enough to create actual changes in practice of the scale seen in Ashura commemorations over the past few decades. Such transformation requires the active participation of the wider community of pious Lebanese Shi'i Muslims. Mass literacy, education, and urbanization, as well as political mobilization against both injustice within Lebanon and Israeli aggression, facilitated the mass participation of Shi'i Muslims in discussions about the reforms and in the practical implementation of reform of various aspects of the commemorations. In many ways the presence of this

16. The institutionalization of sectarianism in the Lebanese political system was accompanied by a more subtle process by which the category of sect became increasingly important to the groups themselves. As noted by Suad Joseph, *The Politicization of Religious Sects in Borj Hammoud, Lebanon* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1975), a sectarian political leadership supported the establishment of sectarian social institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals) rather than public secular ones so that sect became a means of accessing resources. Shi'a underrepresentation in the government led to poverty as government funds were routed into other sectarian communities. Differential population growth added to their underrepresentation so that by the late 1960s class differentiation in Lebanon fell largely along sectarian lines. See Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon* (London: Hutchinson, 1985); and Nazih Richani, *Dilemmas of Democracy and Political Parties in Sectarian Societies: The Case of the Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon, 1949–1996* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998). While there were elites from every sect, the majority of Shi'is fell into the lower classes. For more on the history of the Shi'a in Lebanon, see Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a of Lebanon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Cobban, *Making of Modern Lebanon*; Majed Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992); Michael Hudson, *The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House, 1968); and Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

17. Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, 41.

18. The linking of the battle of Karbala to politics has a long history. Mayel Baktash notes that the first public commemorations of Karbala—sponsored by Sultan Mu'izz al-Dawla in 963 CE/352 AH, just two years after he declared his opposition to the existing caliphate—were "allegorical affairs, redolent of revolution" (Mayel Baktash, "Ta'ziyeh and Its Philosophy," in *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, ed. P. Chelkowski [New York: New York University Press, 1979], 96).

19. Hizbullah was established in the early 1980s and officially announced in 1985. Since then it has developed from a resistance militia to a legitimate political party and organization that include several large social welfare institutions, television and radio stations, several members of the Lebanese Parliament, and numerous local elected officials throughout Lebanon.

20. The disappearance of Musa al-Sadr in 1978 while he was on a visit to Qaddafi in Libya catapulted al-Sadr directly into the Twelver Shi'i narrative of the Hidden Imam, and as a result initiated a surge in his popularity.

21. The links between Ashura and Iranian political discourse around the Islamic revolution have been well detailed: Kamran Aghaie, "The Karbala Narrative: Shi'i Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12 (2001): 151–76; Fischer, *Iran*; Mary Elaine Hegland, "Two Images of Husain: Accommodation and Revolution in a Iranian Village," in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 218–35; Hegland, "Islamic Revival or Political and Cultural Revolution? An Iranian Case Study," in *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. Richard T. Antoun and Mary Elaine Hegland (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 194–219; Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); and Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

widespread debate and discussion is what exemplifies the continuing process of authentication.

The changes that took place in Ashura are especially apparent in three areas: the *majalis* (mourning gatherings), the *masirat* (processions), and, most crucially, the meaning attributed to the events of Muharram. This is not to say that the importance of Ashura has changed; rather, the transformation involves the details of the commemorative practices and a reordering and reprioritization of the two primary emphases of Ashura commemorative practices and meanings; with the soteriological that takes precedence in traditional commemorations sharing primary ground with the revolutionary in authenticated commemorations.

Majalis

During a *majlis* (mourning gathering, sing. of *majalis*),[22] no matter where it falls along the traditional-authenticated spectrum, a reciter (*qari'*)[23] narrates a part of the events of the first ten days of Muharram in a lamentation style reminiscent of a liturgy, detailing graphically the suffering and martyrdom of the Imam and those with him. Some reciters include a sermon that explains lessons to be learned from Karbala and the meanings of the events. The affect of the audience parallels these shifts in tone, with the lamentation liturgy evoking intense crying that quiets to a pensive concentration during the sermon sections.

While all *majalis* include the lamentative narration of the *masa'ib*, the tragic events of Karbala (lit. calamities or misfortunes), reciters that fit my interlocutors' category of "traditional" (*taqlidi*) will include as much detail of suffering as possible in this narration, to elicit maximum levels of emotion from the audience. Many add poetic embellishment and dialogue among Husayn, Zaynab, and others who were with them. The ultimate goal for a traditional-style reciter is to move people to cry as much as possible for the martyred Imam and his family and companions. Mourning for *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet) is believed to have salvatory effects, as those who shed true tears for the martyrs of Karbala may appeal to them for intercession in the afterlife. A sheikh at Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah's office criticized what he saw as an exclusive emphasis on mourning, explaining that it resulted from the lack of proper training. As he put it, "The backward [*mutakhallif*] ones read only to make people cry, but the cultured [*muthaqqaf*] ones teach lessons in their recitations."[24]

Authenticated *majalis* are characterized by longer sermons and a more restrained narration of the events of Karbala. Eliciting an emotional response is still an important goal, but a secondary one. These *majalis* are primarily intended to teach religious, social, and political lessons; to instruct the audience about the authentic meanings of Karbala; and to link the history of the past to the present. Those who recite *majalis* and strive for authenticity are concerned with the historical accuracy of their narrations and avoid including unfounded exaggerations that they see as being "merely" to heighten emotions and make people cry. A reciter explained to me that all too often she felt that her audience cried because her voice reminded them of their own sorrows, but not because they understood the true reasons for grief. Worse, she continued, Husayn did not even want people to cry for him, he just wanted them to understand. This reciter still felt that emotion was important to the *majalis*, but she emphasized that emotion had to be given purpose in this life, in its revision from an end to a means.

Those who have attended *majalis* over the past three decades articulate the shift as well, contrasting the *majalis* they now attend with those they attended in the past (which they labeled traditional). In their comparisons, today's *majalis* were often described as "more reasonable" and "more accepted by our minds."

22. *Majlis* is a term used to refer to both *majalis 'aza*, the mourning or condolence gatherings that take place during Ashura to mourn the death of Imam Husayn (or any other time of year to mourn any death), and the text that is read or recited during those gatherings. David Pinault calls these texts liturgies (*Shiites*).

23. The word *qāri'* can be translated as either "reciter" (especially of religious texts) or "reader." Most reciters of Ashura *majalis* have a text to which they refer while reciting, often a notebook filled with handwritten notes, but they seem to move fluidly between reading and recitation.

24. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from interlocutors are from interviews conducted in the southern suburbs of Beirut between January 2000 and June 2001. All names, other than those of prominent figures (e.g., Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah) have been changed.

As one woman explained:

> They are reciting the same story about Husayn . . . but the lecture differs among people. . . . Before we used to just go and listen to the story of Husayn, it was rare that you found a lecture. Now, we are not just going to cry for Imam Husayn, we are going to learn from his school. The lecture is important, it is clarifying why it is that you are crying, and why Imam Husayn was martyred. It is not just about crying for Imam Husayn, it is about learning the lessons from the school of Imam Husayn.

As noted above, while the shifts in Ashura commemorations carry implications for both men and women, it is women's role in society that has been more critically redefined by these implications. By far the most striking difference in content between traditional and authenticated *majalis*—and what is for pious Shi'i women the root of the most essential aspect of the revolutionary lesson that emerged from this transformation—lies in the reinterpretation of the behavior of Zaynab during and following the events of Karbala:

> Before they would present Sayyida Zaynab as crying, screaming, wailing, but, no, Zaynab set the stage . . . for revolution against tyranny. She didn't mourn Husayn but thought how to save the rest and how to keep his message going. She was imprisoned, and yet she stood up with all confidence and spoke her point of view instead of feeling defeated. This changed our lives, we are now ashamed to feel weak, or to feel sorrow. Whenever we are faced with a problem, we remember the words, and feel shamed if we complain. No, we instead feel strong and deal with it and move on.

Traditional narrations often portrayed Zaynab as buried in grief, pulling at her hair and shedding copious tears over the dead and dying. Reciters of authenticated *majalis* along with their audiences criticized traditional portrayals of Zaynab for their exaggerated emphasis on her tears. In authenticated *majalis*, representations that had depicted Zaynab as a plaintive mourner were transformed into renderings that accentuated her courage, strength, and resilience.[25] Zaynab became the person who "stood up in the face of the oppressor" and "told him that she was the victor." Her role as the leader of the community in captivity, and afterward until Zayn al-Abidin took his place as Imam, is highlighted in these accounts. It is Zaynab who carries the history of Ashura forward to future generations of Shi'i Muslims. This reinterpretation has had major ramifications for the lives and community participation of pious Shi'i women, allotting to them a responsibility for public welfare parallel to that of men. One area where this is apparent is in changes in women's participation in the Ashura *masirat.*

Masirat

The most obvious change in the *masirat* has occurred in the style of *latam* (self-flagellation) that men and boys perform following the *majlis* on the tenth of Muharram. The traditional style of *latam*—best exemplified by the Ashura *masirat* in the southern Lebanese town of Nabatieh[26]—involves the shedding of one's own blood. Those performing *latam* form small groups and move quickly, almost at a jog, as they invoke the names of Ali and Husayn and hit the small wounds that have been cut at their hairlines, so that blood flows down their faces and stains their white shirts or bare chests a bright red. Women generally do not participate in these *masirat*,[27] though they make up at least half of the crowd that lines the street and leans over balconies and from nearby rooftops to watch.[28]

25. Another interesting shift is that Zaynab is emphasized more than Fatima (the Prophet's daughter and Husayn's mother), who is often considered the paramount female model of piety in Shi'i Islam and who is remembered not only for her piety but for her unending sorrow and weeping for her father, husband, and children (*ahl al-bayt*), which will continue until Judgment Day.

26. When Ashura was primarily a rural folk tradition for the Shi'a in Lebanon, it was centered in Nabatieh. Each year since the early 1900s, a passion play reenacting the events of Karbala is performed on the field at the center of Nabatieh, and processions occur around it. Today people still pour into the town during Ashura, both to participate in *majalis* and traditional mourning processions and to watch what has become a spectacle. For another description of Ashura in Nabatieh, see A. R. Norton and Ali Safa, "Ashura in Nabatiyye," *Middle East Insight* 15 (2000): 21–28.

27. During Ashura in Nabatieh in 2000, I did see six women who had participated in *latam*. My hosts in Nabatieh seemed as surprised as I was to see this; their explanation was that these women had probably shed their blood in fulfillment of vows made earlier in the year.

28. Given the strict gender segregation seen in many Shi'i communities with regard to religious ritual—e.g., Hegland, "Two Images of Husain"; Hegland, "Islamic Revival"; Mary Elaine Hegland, "Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (Trans)forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender through Pakistani Women's Rituals of Mourning," *American Ethnologist* 25 (1998): 240–66; Hegland, "The Power Paradox in Muslim Women's *Majales*: North-West Pakistani Mourning Rituals as Sites of Contestation over Religious Politics,

As the revolutionary Shi‘i Islamic movement in Lebanon took shape and grew in popularity, the shedding of blood while performing *latam* was criticized as un-Islamic because it involves purposely injuring oneself. This echoed the criticisms put forth by al-Amin in the 1920s, and, interestingly, al-Amin's work was republished in Beirut in the early 1970s,[29] just as the seeds of the Islamic movement were beginning to germinate. A few of my interlocutors knew about al-Amin's writings and referred to them as "finally" being implemented in the community. Eventually, following the lead of Iran,[30] Lebanese Shi‘i clerics issued fatwas condemning the practice as un-Islamic, and Hizbullah banned it outright in the mid-1990s.[31]

In Lebanon, this was accompanied by calls for those who feel the need to shed their blood during Ashura to do so for the community good, by instead donating blood to local bloodbanks.[32] Indeed, the Islamic Health Committee's offices in the southern suburbs of Beirut report receiving so many blood donations during Ashura that they have a large surplus each year immediately after the commemoration and that over the past five years donations during this time have increased exponentially. In Nabatieh itself, Hizbullah has set up a blood donation center on the tenth of Muharram since 1998, attracting over five hundred donors in 2000.[33]

A sharp contrast to traditional *masirat* and *latam* is presented by Hizbullah's authenticated *masirat*, which take place each year in several areas of Lebanon, including the southern suburbs of Beirut, Nabatieh, and Baalbek in the Beqaa.[34] These *masirat* exhibit military order: they generally begin with several large images and banners, which are followed by large organized groups of men and boys performing *latam*, scout groups carrying banners and flags with Ashura sayings, cars, or floats depicting scenes related to Karbala or the Islamic Resistance, and groups of Hizbullah-affiliated religious leaders, and elected officials, all of which is followed by a general marching of men and boys demonstrating solidarity with both the party and Husayn. Organized groups of girls and women follow, and then comes a general crowd of women, many of them pushing babies and young children, all dressed in black, in carriages, expressing their solidarity.[35]

The men and boys performing *latam* are organized by age and dressed uniformly as scouts or entirely in black. They march in three neat rows behind a microphone-bearing leader,

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Ethnicity, and Gender," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23 (1998): 392–428; Elizabeth W. Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (New York: Anchor, 1965); Robert A. Fernea and Elizabeth W. Fernea, "Variation in Religious Observance among Islamic Women," in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis in Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 385–401; Azam Torab, "Piety as Gendered Agency: A Study of *Jalaseh* Ritual Discourse in an Urban Neighborhood in Iran," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (1996): 235–52; David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave, 2001)—it is worth making the small point here that the less strict gendering of Lebanese society is reflected in Lebanese Shi‘i ritual. While *majalis* are gender segregated—either with women's and men's *majalis* held separately or with women seated in a separate section of the building or room (e.g., in the Hizbullah public *majalis*, women fill the rear half of the tent and men sit in the front half)—men and women mix relatively freely outside while watching *masirat*. This may be particularly true of traditional Ashura, as several older informants expressed looking forward to Ashura in Nabatieh each year during their youth because of the "carnavalesque" atmosphere and the freedom they had to walk around the town and interact with members of the opposite sex.

29. Ende, "Flagellations of Muharram."

30. Khomeini frowned on the practice before his death in 1989, and Khamenei officially condemned shedding blood during Muharram rituals in a 1994 fatwa, citing not only self-injury but also the negative image of Islam that these rituals project both within and outside the Islamic community. See Houchang Chehabi, "Ardabil Becomes a Province: Center-Periphery Relations in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 235–53; and Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*.

31. Each year just before Ashura, religious leaders reiterate their opposition to traditional *latam*. Recently, even political leaders, including Nabih Berri, the leader of Harakat Amal, have taken a public stand against it. But the practice persists, and there remain those who support it as an appropriate form.

32. The call for people to go to blood banks instead of shedding their own blood is also noted in Pinault's discussion of local criticism to self-flagellation during Muharram in India in *Horse of Karbala*, and in Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi‘i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

33. Nicholas Blanford, "One Way or the Other, Ashura Brings Blood," *Daily Star*, Beirut, www.dailystar.com.lb/05_04_01/art2.htm.

34. Tensions are often high between Hizbullah and the other Lebanese Shi‘i political party, Harakat Amal, during Ashura in Nabatieh, occasionally resulting in violence. Those performing traditional *latam* sometimes wear Amal clothing or bandannas, setting them even further apart from Hizbullah. My local hosts at the Nabatieh commemoration in 2000 expressed frustration at how "Ashura has been taken out of the hands of the people of Nabatieh, it has been made so political." Since 2003, there has been an agreement forbidding political signs and symbols at the Nabatieh processions, which have instead been organized by an independent local nonaffiliated organization.

35. In some cases, particularly if a child is ill, a woman may vow to walk with her child in the procession if her supplications for the health of her child are answered.

who initiates *nadbat*, lamentation songs or elegies, and chants, and ensures that the groups perform *latam* in perfect unison so that it provides a percussive accompaniment. Crucially, the style of *latam* performed does not involve blood;[36] instead, those performing it begin by swinging both arms downward, then up, then out away from their bodies, and finally in to strike their chests with their hands.[37] This is done to a four-count rhythm so that on every fourth beat the sound of hands striking chests resonates loudly.

Another striking difference is that women are no longer relegated to an observational role. In addition to condemning traditional forms of *latam*, the mobilizing Lebanese Shi‘i movement, in typical fashion, called on women to participate actively and publicly in Ashura commemorations, as well as in the community more generally.[38] Authenticated *masirat* include women and girls, dressed in full *‘abaya* (Iranian-style long black robe and head covering) and organized by age in ordered groups similar to those of the men. The women's groups do not perform *latam*, but each group is led in chants, or *nadbat* (elegies), by a leader. Young girls may carry photographs of martyrs, generally assumed to be their fathers or brothers, flowered wreaths with martyrs' names on them, or hands representing the cut-off hands of Abbas.[39] Often, one group of young women will walk together, sometimes in chains, with their faces completely covered, representing the women in the Imam's party who were taken captive by the Caliph Yazid's army. Like the authenticated style of *latam*, the active participation of women in the *masirat* is viewed by many Shi‘i Muslims as more authentic with regard to both history and Islam. It is also an apt symbolic representation of the reverberations of Zaynab's example in the lives of pious women, a point that I return to below.

Meaning

As can be inferred from the descriptions of traditional-style *majalis* and *latam*, the emotions surrounding Ashura commemorated in this way express both grief and regret. Tears shed for the martyrs of Karbala are tears that are *mustahabb*, or religiously commendable. It is believed that both evoking these tears and shedding them are acts that bring *‘ajr* (divine reward)[40] and that may increase one's chances of entering heaven.[41] Blood spilled in memory of the events of Karbala is similarly an embodied demonstration of grief and an empathetic expression of solidarity with the Imam's pain and sorrow. It can also be an expression of regret or remorse.[42] Some of those who perform the traditional style of *latam* explain that this demonstrates their regret for not being at Karbala with the Imam—a reference to those Shi‘is who originally called on the Imam to come and lead their revolution, but who then failed to arrive at Karbala in time to either protect the Imam or stand and die with him.

36. Some of those who view self-bleeding as un-Islamic only use the standard Arabic term *latam* to refer to the authenticated form of the practice, to further distinguish between styles that do and do not involve the shedding of blood. They then refer to the style involving blood only by the colloquial phrase "hitting haydar." Also, in spoken Arabic, authenticated *latam* is often simply described by the verb *nadab*, to mourn or lament, with context indicating the specific act that is referred to (e.g., striking oneself versus singing an elegy).

37. This specific style of *latam* is a hybrid of faster-paced Iranian and slower Iraqi styles and seems to have become the dominant style of *latam* for Hizbullah as well as followers of Fadlullah since 1995.

38. The classic examples of women's mobilization as part of larger national or religious revolutionary or resistance movements are Iran and Algeria. See also Julie Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), on women and the Palestinian national resistance; and Hegland, "Power Paradox," on women in the Pakistani Shi‘i Islamist movement.

39. Abu al-Fadl Abbas is the brother of Husayn and Zaynab, whose hands were cut off when he was martyred at Karbala. The *majlis* commemorating him is one of the most moving and holds special meaning for women and girls who have lost male kin in the Resistance, as Abbas was the special *kafil* (supporter) of Zaynab.

40. As used in common parlance in this community, *‘ajr* denotes divine recompense—afterlife credits one can accumulate through good deeds, among them mourning Husayn, that will be added up on Judgment Day.

41. For detailed discussions of the redemptive and intercessory importance of mourning the events of Karbala in Shi‘ism, see Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, and Pinault, *Shiites* and *Horse of Karbala*. See also Aghaie, "Karbala Narrative," and Schubel, *Religious Performance*.

42. Forms of *latam* that draw blood, including flagellation, are often seen as embodiments of grief leading to intercession or as the demonstration of solidarity with the Imam. Vernon Schubel, "The Muharram Majlis: The Role of a Ritual in the Preservation of Shi‘a Identity," in *Muslim Families in North America*, ed. Earle H. Waugh, Sharon McIrvin Abu-Laban, and Regula Burckhardt Qureshi (Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 1991), 118–31, expresses this clearly: "This is part of the reason behind such acts as flagellation and firewalking—a desire to demonstrate physically the willingness to suffer the kinds of wounds that would have been incurred at Karbala." I would add regret to these meanings—regret stemming from an identification with the Shi‘a from Kufa who did not stand with Husayn, but also encompassing a generalized remorse for all the times in one's life that one did not live up to Husayn's example.

In the context of pre-1970s Lebanon, when Shi'i Muslims were the least politically organized group in the country, all of these meanings can be seen as stemming from the general political quietism of most of the Lebanese Shi'a. Even al-Amin, in his attempts at reform in the 1920s, did not criticize weeping (though he criticized blood) and in fact encouraged it as an expression of grief, regret, and identification with Husayn and the Shi'i collective, as well as for its salvatory effects.[43] The emphasis during Ashura was on individual religious experiences of mourning and regret, embodied through tears and blood, as well as on the reinforcement of a sense of community identity built around collective mourning and suffering rather than political activism.[44] While at first glance the association of blood and quietism may seem contradictory, in this instance, the shedding of blood is directed at the self, rather than outward, implying a personal expression of grief, an internal struggle with regret, and the potential for individual salvation, rather than collective political or social action.[45]

It is less clear whether traditional commemorations since the Shi'i Islamic mobilization carry the same connotations of quietism—certainly for some participants they do, while for others tears and blood demonstrate their readiness for self-sacrifice for the community. The latter view was expressed by some who defend the traditional form of commemoration today. I watched the Ashura *masira* in Nabatieh in 2000 from a friend's very crowded first-floor balcony. Many of the people watching and participating with their tears around me commented that the display of self-injurious *latam* was a demonstration of the readiness of their youth to defend the community and fight against the Israeli occupation.

Yet from the perspective of those who advocate for authenticated meanings and practices, the blood and tears of traditional Ashura commemorations are both un-Islamic and passive: "Too much crying leads to personalities who cry—the Shi'a will become equated with crying, the Shi'a will take on crying as a cultural trait, and this is not a good thing, it is wrong. Emotions are necessary, but they should be understood as a way of arriving at learning the lesson of Husayn. The heart should be used to reach the head, not as an endpoint in and of itself."[46]

For many in this community, this is a reflection of Fadlullah's views on the matter. As explained to me by another sheikh at Fadlullah's office, the Sayyid's campaign to reform Ashura involves several issues. First, he emphasizes choosing appropriate, that is, educated and "cultured" (*muthaqqaf*), reciters and appropriate (logical and without "mythology and exaggeration") material for *majalis*.[47] He also suggests considering alternate forms of commemoration, moving beyond the recitations to include plays and art that teach the lesson of Imam Husayn. Basic to the Sayyid's reforms are the discouragement of the *shawa'ib* (defects or impurities) of Ashura, referring to the shedding of blood during *latam*. The final aspect of his reform, and one that Fadlullah is one of the few religious leaders to espouse, is a criticism of the act of crying itself, as reflected in the above statements of some of the participants in authenticated Ashura.

Fadlullah's views on these issues are located toward the far end of the authentication spectrum and are seen as too extreme by some who advocate authentic Islam, especially some Hizbullah members (who often cited the viewpoint of Hizbullah's secretary-general Sayyid

43. Nakash, "Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals."

44. A comparison can be seen here with the contemporary Armenian case in which Armenian ethnic identity is in part constructed around a shared sense of suffering related to the unacknowledged trauma of the Armenian genocide.

45. Contrast Hegland's observation in "Islamic Revival?" that in the community where she did research in Iran, practices of self-injurious flagellation using chains were revived during the revolution as a form of political resistance.

46. It is possible that Fadlullah's de-emphasis on weeping (for men and women alike) is related to the notion Abu-Lughod discusses in "Islam and the Gendered Discourses" that too much lamenting is not an Islamically appropriate way of approaching death, because one should accept God's will without protest. If so, this may be another aspect of Shi'i reformers' concerns with how their community is viewed by outsiders—in this case, Sunni Muslims.

47. In this Fadlullah is in agreement with al-Amin. Despite al-Amin's encouragement of weeping, he also wanted to reform the *majalis*, calling for well-trained reciters who could lead them without "quoting false traditions, spreading superstitious legends" (cited in Ende, "Flagellations of Muharram").

Hasan Nasrallah in contrast).[48] Their critique is that Fadlullah has overintellectualized Ashura and placed too much emphasis on knowledge, understanding, and application. As one Hizbullah member put it, "It's not just a philosophy, it's not just knowledge, it's not just a phenomena, it is a feeling, an emotion, the embodiment [*tajsid*] of meaning. It's not just mind [*'aql*] it is also emotion [*'atif*]. People have to *feel* with Husayn."

But Fadlullah's critics also noted that the difference was one of emphasis, that Hizbullah also valued knowledge and understanding of Ashura more than those who espoused traditional commemorative forms. In the view of Fadlullah's critics (who were also Hizbullah members), however, they sought a more equal balance between mind and emotion. As I will show, this may be in part because of the very practical links between Ashura and Hizbullah's Islamic Resistance.

Accompanying the discouragement of traditional *latam*, and the historical verification and shift in emphasis of the *majalis*, was a redirection of the message of Ashura outward, shifting the meaning from one of mourning, regret, and salvation to a revolutionary lesson that emphasized action against oppression.[49] This is not to say that notions of *'ajr* and personal salvation have been stripped from Ashura, or that there was no element of community identity in the traditional commemorations, but rather that the primary emphasis and tone of the commemorations have undergone a fundamental alteration. Indeed, those who espouse authenticated forms of Ashura insist that *'ajr* comes from attending or holding *majalis* and remembering Husayn, Zaynab, and those who were with them, but not from the act of crying itself. The affective and the collective coexist in all Ashura commemorations—the former located in the private emotional experience of piety, and the latter bridging the common ground of culturally mediated shared experiences and meanings—but their proportion and ordering are being shifted.

In the context of war and deprivation, as the Lebanese Shi'i Islamic movement mobilized socially and militarily, the message of revolution in the events of Muharram was highlighted.[50] The energy and emotive power located in the commemorations were redirected and focused onto a shared set of goals. The emphasis on the importance of historical accuracy and evidence was key to this process. When the myths were stripped away and only the authentic historical record remained, the liberatory message of Ashura was highlighted. Authentic history demonstrated that the battle and martyrdom of the Imam took place in a context of revolution.

As understood by pious Shi'i Muslims, the revolution of Imam Husayn was a moral revolution, one in which the fundamental lesson was that one must always stand up to one's oppressor and that only through resistance is freedom possible. Hajjeh Fatima, a reciter, defined the revolutionary lesson of Karbala to me as "in every era there is an oppressor and an oppressed." This lesson was explained to me again and again, often in terms that exploded spatial and temporal boundaries, as Hajjeh Fatima continued:

48. More evidence of Fadlullah's views on Ashura can be seen in his sermons—which revolve around Ashura during the commemoration each year, on the fortieth memorial of Husayn's death, and at other times as well. These are available (in Arabic and sometimes English) on his Web site: www.bayynat.org.

49. Fischer describes this process in detail for the Iranian revolution, which he characterizes as "the ultimate passion play of the Karbala paradigm," shifting from a passive witnessing of weeping for Husayn and waiting for the twelfth Imam to an active witnessing of fighting and working for the overthrow of tyranny (*Iran*, 183; see also Hegland, "Islamic Revival?" Interestingly, in the context Hegland discusses, self-injurious forms of flagellation were revived as part of the process of transformation of Shi'ism to revolutionary). Fischer goes on to argue that after the revolution's success, a shift occurred away from the emphasis on "Husayn as the symbol of protest against tyranny to 'Ali as the symbol of constructive government and Muhammad as the symbol of universalism" (*Iran*, 213). It remains to be seen what, if any, similar changes occur in Lebanon with the liberation of most of the south from Israeli occupation in 2000.

50. Again, the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and what Hegland calls the "'Imam Husain as Example' framework" ("Two Images of Husain") fueled this reinterpretation in the Lebanese context. Supporters and members of Hizbullah persist in using the term "revolutionary" to discuss their goals as well as those of Husayn at Karbala—this despite Hizbullah's official disavowal of the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon during the 1992 election campaigns. The revolutionary or political meanings and uses of the Karbala paradigm in various contexts have also been discussed by Aghaie, "Karbala Narrative"; Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good and Byron J. Good, "Ritual, the State, and the Transformation of Emotional Discourse in Iranian Society," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 12 (1988): 43–63; Hegland, "Two Images of Husain"; Momen, *Introduction to Shi'i Islam*; Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World*; Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religious and Politics in Iran* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Peters, "Muslim Passion Play"; and Gustav Thaiss, "Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The Drama of Husain," in Keddie, *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis in Muslim Religious Institutions*, 349–66, among others.

> They [the *majalis*] remind us also that there is always something called the oppressor and something called the oppressed. And this history always repeats itself, throughout all the eras, there was never a time when there wasn't an oppressor and people who were oppressed. . . . So the remembrance of Ashura reminds us of this always, so that we will never forget . . . that people should always have the spirit of revolution against oppression, in all its faces, no matter what its identity. . . . Oppression doesn't have a specific identity, it is general, it exists all over the world, in all the confessions, in all the religions, it is not limited. People should have this spirit of revolution against oppression because time repeats itself, history repeats itself, and in every age there is injustice.

In the words of another of my interlocutors, a member of Hizbullah: "Ashura is the enlivening/revival [*ihya'*] of revolution." This man, Hajjeh Fatima, and every single pious Shi'i Muslim with whom I spoke emphasized the universality and the importance of the message of Ashura. "*Ab'ad karbala' tarikhiyya* [the dimensions of Karbala are historical]," the Hizbullah member said passionately; "without Karbala there would be no revolution! Karbala is for all the world, what Husayn did was stand against oppression!"

The shift in the meaning of Ashura from the soteriological to the revolutionary suggests a parallel shift in notions of temporality. Traditional Ashura commemorations involve reexperiencing the battle of Karbala each year, as though one were there with the Imam; in a sense, time is captured at this essential and essentializing moment in Shi'i history. In contrast, the emphasis of authenticated commemorations on the revolutionary implies lineal temporal change, lessons to be learned from history but applied toward the future. To apply these lessons, one must actively participate in the betterment of one's community. I will return to this activism-oriented stance, after first touching on the emergence of authenticated Ashura and its accompanying message in public spaces and discourses.

Living Authenticated Ashura

Ashura in Public Spaces and Discourses

Authenticated forms of Ashura commemoration have become the standard in the southern suburbs of Beirut among Shi'is who follow Fadlullah as their *marja' al-taqlid* or support Hizbullah.[51] These include both privately and publicly held *majalis*, usually accompanied by loudspeakers and microphones that guarantee that they will be heard throughout neighborhoods. The numbers and levels of attendance at both have increased dramatically over the past ten years. In addition to public *majalis* held in mosques and *husayniyyat*, since the mid-1990s *majalis* have been held in tents constructed by Hizbullah and Harakat Amal in parking lots and other empty spaces around Beirut and its southern suburbs. Most prominent among them is the main Hizbullah "tent" from which evening *majalis* have been broadcast over the party's Al-Manar television station since 1995, and where Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah speaks on alternate nights. Additionally, according to Hizbullah's weekly newspaper, no less than fifty-one official Hizbullah-sponsored *majalis* were held in Beirut alone in 2001.[52] While it is difficult to estimate attendance at these *majalis*, major Lebanese newspapers agree that "several hundred thousand" persons participated in the 2000 and 2001 tenth-day processions, while Al-Manar television estimated 200,000 attendees in 2001.

The visual environment of the southern suburbs is markedly altered during Ashura as well. Black banners hang from buildings and balconies and are strung across roads and attached to streetlights and electrical poles. Written on these banners are texts commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn: sayings of the Prophet, Qur'anic verses, or quotes from Khomeini and other important figures, all of which highlight the importance of Ashura and sometimes relate this history to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and Hizbullah's Islamic

51. Each Shi'i Muslim must choose a religious leader to follow as his *marja' al-taqlid*, or source of emulation in religious matters. Fadlullah is the most prominent *marja'* in Lebanon today. Authenticated Ashura is not uncontested in the southern suburbs of Beirut or in Lebanon. See note 5.

52. "Majālis 'aza' fi beirut wa al-junub wa al-Bekaa," *Al-'Ahd*, 30 March 2001, 10.

Resistance.[53] An aura of mourning is palpable; people speak quietly, and laughter is frowned upon. Many make an effort to dress in black or other somber colors; indeed, the preponderance of black everywhere strikingly distinguishes the southern suburbs of Beirut from the rest of the city during Muharram.

The spread and growth of Ashura commemorations indicate a broader public exposure to and participation in the articulation and use of authenticated Ashura discourses as well as in the production of authenticity itself. One aspect of this involves new Shi'i religious and political mass media, including Hizbullah's television and radio stations and the radio station affiliated with Sayyid Fadlullah. While these media provide wider access to the officially produced discourses of sayyids and sheikhs, they also afford wider participation in the production of Ashura discourses, through a plethora of call-in radio shows for both adults and children and television ranging from Karbala-inspired serials to documentaries to specials about poetry devoted to Ashura. For example, one radio program addressed to children asked questions about the Ashura history, for example, "how many people went with Imam Husayn to Karbala?" Children then called in and received prizes for correct answers.[54]

Another crucial component of the articulation of authenticated Ashura discourses involves informal conversations, daily talk among pious women and men. These conversations contributed to the authentication of particular Ashura narratives. For women in particular, participation in the authentication process is in keeping with Zaynab's reformulated role at Karbala—that of bearer of the message of revolution to others. Whether over coffee in a neighbor's kitchen, or en route to or from a *majlis* with a cousin or friend, women often debated the historical accuracy of details of the events of Karbala.[55] For example, sitting on the balcony one afternoon, Aziza and her neighbor discussed at length whether it could be corroborated that—as the reciter of a *majlis* the day before had depicted—Husayn had indeed given his young daughter Ruqayya a cup before his death, telling her that it would turn black inside if he were killed. Some of these conversations were sparked by a listener's skepticism toward a specific reciter, others triggered by discord between the version of an episode recited in a *majlis* just attended and the version broadcast over the radio in the car on the way home.

Conversations like this one were common and confirmed the continual process by which authenticated Ashura is shaped. Here we again see the difference between authentication linked to the Shi'i Islamic movement and the attempts at reform made by al-Amin in the 1920s. Public participation in the authentication process is one way in which Imam Husayn "remains alive" for my interlocutors. Another way is through the translation of the message and values taught in the commemorations into models for contemporary daily life. Yitzhak Nakash notes that in Ashura "the world as lived and the world as imagined are fused together."[56] The conclusion of this article explores that fusion, especially the manifestation of the models of Husayn and Zaynab in the lives of pious Shi'i men and women today.

Sacrificing Blood, Sacrificing Sweat

The most obvious parallels between Ashura and currently lived experience for many pious Shi'i Muslims in Lebanon are with the Islamic Resistance. Indeed, the history of the battle of Karbala is explicitly linked to contemporary instances of injustice and oppression in Lebanon,

53. Despite Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, the border is still disputed by Hizbullah, Lebanon, and Syria; Israeli planes continue to break the sound barrier over Lebanon; and both sides held prisoners until the exchange that took place in early 2004. However, active violence along the border has subsided significantly.

54. As Eickelman and Anderson discuss, these media become more participatory as the asymmetries between producers and consumers are reduced and "the boundaries between public and private communication that once seemed clear become blurred" (Dale F. Eickelman and John W. Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," in *New Media in the Muslim World* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999], 4). In this case, this blurring occurs as telephone calls bring conversations that were once privately held into the public arena via radio call-in shows.

55. While some of these conversations no doubt were prompted by the necessity of assuring that the anthropologist present recorded the "correct" version of the Imam's martyrdom, as indeed I was urged to do, heated conversations during which I was not present were frequently related to me after the fact, and on several occasions I entered into discussions of *majalis* details already in progress.

56. Nakash, "Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals," 162.

especially the Israeli occupation.[57] While describing her experience of the day that former head of Hizbullah Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi was martyred along with his wife and young son, one of my interlocutors unequivocally articulated her association of Ashura history with the present:

> I was in the South, and it was a beautiful day, cold and sunny, like today. My son was a baby, and they told me it was good to walk him in the sunshine, so I went outside to walk with him. Then I saw a plane. It was normal in that area, the Israelis flew over us many times a day, and they were bombing regularly. But this plane flew out toward the coast, and, I don't know why, or what was different about it, but suddenly, suddenly, it occurred to me that this plane was from Yazid! That this was Yazid, and how Yazid didn't care about children; how he killed Sayyida Zaynab's young child without caring. And suddenly, when this occurred to me, I don't know how it did, but I held my son close and ran back into the house quickly with him. I felt so scared for him, as though this plane was going to kill my son. And later that day I learned that that same plane, the same plane that I had seen was the plane that killed Sayyid Abbas and his son.

Just as Yazid was equated with Israel—an association made even more real in 1983 when the Israeli army disrupted the Ashura commemorations in Nabatieh—the Islamic Resistance was equated with Husayn. The most blatant associations were the direct ones made by Hizbullah. For example, at the end of a play depicting what happened to the women at Karbala after Husayn's martyrdom—performed by students at one of the Hizbullah schools in the area and sponsored by the women's committee of Hizbullah—segments of video from Al-Manar television were shown. Aside from clips of the Ashura *masira* and of Nasrallah speaking, there were scenes of Islamic Resistance operations, with a booming voice-over that stated, "This is our Karbala, this is our Husayn, we live on, Karbala lives on in the Lebanese Resistance."

My interlocutors who were not in Hizbullah also noted the importance of Ashura to the Resistance. One woman explained that just as Husayn fought Yazid, the Resistance would be able to defeat Israel, "the largest occupying power in the world." This statement was echoed by a pious man in an anecdote he told about his response to a radio journalist who once asked him, "What did Husayn do?":

> In that way, a skeptic, he asked me, "What did Husayn do?" I was silent for a while, I said, let's finish our coffee first. And I said to him after we finished our coffee, "If I want to tell you on the air what I know about who Husayn was, it will take hours, and if I want to go and do some more research and then tell you, it will take three months. But you are asking what Husayn did?" I said, "He made Jabal Safi and the Western Beqaa, he is sitting up there." And he shut up. And they all applauded me.

The two places this man mentions—Jabal Safi and the Western Beqaa—were Israeli outposts taken by the Islamic Resistance. All these statements linking or even equating the battle of Karbala with the Resistance explicitly highlight the overlap of Husayn and the Resistance fighters. For pious Shi'i men, Imam Husayn is the ideal role model. What that means may differ by context, but in Lebanon since the early 1980s it has clearly meant participation in the Resistance. This participation may be either military or in a supportive role—whether rebuilding homes destroyed in Israeli attacks or teaching in a *hawza* (theological school), just to cite two of the many possibilities—depending on one's age, abilities, and disposition.

My field research did not include direct participation-observation of Resistance activities and none of my interlocutors—to my knowledge—were currently fighters with the Resistance. The perspective I am able to provide here is rather that of the wider community of pious Shi'i Muslims and other supporters of the Resistance in the southern suburbs of Beirut. My interlocutors held martyrs and their families in the highest esteem and frequently spoke about how they had made the greatest possible sacrifice for the freedom and integrity of their community. Martyrs' names are announced and

57. Another highly relevant parallel can be seen in the current U.S. occupation of Iraq. In his speech on the fortieth-day commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom in spring of 2003, Nasrallah stated, "Why are these millions going to Karbala? To be inspired by Husayn's spirit of revolution to fight injustice" (quoted in the *Daily Star*, 23 April 2003).

known in the community. They are memorialized in photographs that line the streets of the southern suburbs of Beirut, special exhibitions and newspapers, and on radio and television. Every day Hizbullah's radio station lists the names and basic information for those who died on that day in history. Al-Manar television correspondents interview martyrs' families—who always speak of their pride and faith—and the station sometimes broadcasts video messages taped by the martyr before his death. Exhibits display writings and other artifacts of martyrs, which are collected by a special department at the Martyr's Association.[58]

None of this is very different from the esteem in which members of the U.S. armed forces are held when they too give their lives for their community. The names and photographs of soldiers killed in action are broadcast on local television, and their families are sometimes interviewed, speaking of them with pride. Local memorial ceremonies are held, as well as national ceremonies in Washington, DC. Because the wars fought by the U.S. armed forces take place in faraway places, and because of the scale of the United States more generally, it is easy to forget how personal war is. In the southern suburbs of Beirut, and Lebanon more generally, the places seen on television are familiar and the faces are often recognized.

Two small differences that could be suggested are the scale and boundaries of the communities and the motivations underlying the soldiers' sacrifices. In the first case, it could be argued that the community of the U.S. armed forces is a nation-state, while that of the Islamic Resistance can instead be defined on either a local or a transnational level. However, the ultimate goal of the Islamic Resistance is the liberation of an occupied nation-state, and especially in recent years it has cast itself—and been cast by the Lebanese state—as a national resistance movement.

The other potential difference, and the one emphasized most often in Western media, involves the fundamental motivations for self-sacrifice and the notion of going willingly and knowingly to one's death. This is not the place for a detailed comparison of soldiers who die in wars and those who sacrifice themselves in martyrdom operations, commonly referred to as "suicide bombings," so I limit myself to a couple brief points. First, not all Resistance martyrs die in martyrdom operations. Those who want to do a martyrdom operation volunteer, and, if chosen, they are eventually instructed as to whether and when they will conduct their attack. Most martyrs, however, are "killed in action" and not as part of a planned martyrdom operation. In the past, there were multiple martyrs from some families, but in recent years, once one son dies, his brothers can no longer fight with the Resistance.

Second, the issue of religious motivation is complex. For fighters with the Islamic Resistance, the model of Imam Husayn provides inspiration—because it is believed by many that he went to Karbala with foreknowledge of his imminent death and yet went unafraid and with faith, knowing that his death was part of a greater victory.[59] Pious Shi'i men who choose to sacrifice themselves in martyrdom operations do have absolute faith in the value of their deaths and in the afterlife. I do not know about the faith of those in the U.S. armed forces, though I imagine that it varies widely. However, it is important to note that within Lebanon, fighters with the Islamic Resistance are not the only people who have undertaken martyrdom operations. As we are seeing in Palestine today, resistance fighters with secular organizations also sacrifice themselves for their nation. In Lebanon, martyrdom operations against Israeli military targets have been carried out by Palestinian resistance groups, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Lebanese Communist Party, the Arab Socialist Baath Party, and the Progressive Socialist Party, in addition to Hizbullah and Harakat Amal.[60]

58. This department is filled with binders that hold martyrs' last statements, letters, essays, journal entries, philosophical writings, and poetry. Most of the documents were handwritten, some were typed, and a few had been published. One martyr had written a play.

59. Many Shi'i Muslims believe that Husayn's martyrdom has been preordained from the time of Adam and tell the history as such.

60. Asad AbuKhalil, "Ideology and Practice of Hizballah in Lebanon: Islamization of Leninist Organizational Principles," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27 (1991): 390–403.

While some martyrs in both the Lebanese and—as highlighted in recent news reports—the Palestinian resistances have been women, the translation of Husayn's martyrdom into a model for military participation in Hizbullah's Islamic Resistance in Lebanon is directed exclusively at men. This is not to say that Husayn does not also provide a model for women with regard to the sacrifice he made for the Muslim community. However, for women, the paragon of piety and sacrifice that emerges from Ashura is embodied instead in Sayyida Zaynab.

In the reformulation of Zaynab's behavior at Karbala described above, three characteristics are emphasized: her strength of mind, her compassion and dedication to others, and her courage to speak. The first of these is especially important to women's expected roles as the mothers, wives, or sisters of martyrs. My interlocutors who had lost loved ones to the Resistance frequently pointed to Zaynab's ability to endure the loss of all the men in her family. They explained that they coped with their grief by emulating the equanimity of Zaynab during and after the battle of Karbala. They compared their losses to hers and, in so doing, expressed feeling that they had lost little in comparison: "We didn't lose everyone, like Sayyida Zaynab did. We have to say, if she could go on, why can't we? And we at least have role models; there is acknowledgment in society for the mothers of martyrs, the Sayyida had none of that."

Being the mother—or the wife or sister—of a martyr is valued among pious Shi'i Muslims and supporters of the Resistance, and many whose male family members are martyred carry their loss as an honor. Yet although the model of Zaynab provides strength for women who have lost loved ones to the Resistance, this is not the area in which Zaynab's positive qualities are most frequently stressed. Significantly, the model of Zaynab—and particularly her compassion and her outspokenness—was understood to be a model for public activism among my interlocutors, an important addition to the relatively passive role of "mother of a martyr" often delegated to women in nationalist and religious struggles.[61] Women are utilizing the salient example of Zaynab as an outspoken, strong, and compassionate activist to push the boundaries of what is acceptable and expectable for pious Lebanese Shi'i women.[62] We have seen this new emphasis in the active participation of women in the authenticated Ashura *masirat* (processions). Women are also contributing to the authentication process itself through their daily conversations and debates about the Ashura story and its commemoration.

However, the primary vehicle through which pious Shi'i women live Ashura in their daily lives is through public community-service activities. The reinterpretation of Zaynab as able to act despite her grief and the turmoil of her surroundings plays an important role in inspiring hundreds of women in the southern suburbs of Beirut to volunteer their time and energy—a sacrifice of sweat—for the welfare of their community.[63] More than merely a role model, Zaynab has become an idealized standard of behavior to which many of my interlocutors aspired. Those who are active participants in the welfare of the community are seen to embody the very qualities in Zaynab that are emulated—emotional strength, outspokenness, and dedication to others.

61. For more on the emphasis placed on women's role as mothers of martyrs, see Peteet, *Gender in Crisis*, on Palestinian women; and Zahra Kamalkhani, *Women's Islam: Religious Practice among Women in Today's Iran* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), on Iranian women.

62. For discussions of how women use ritual settings and activities to open new social and cultural spaces for themselves, see Hegland, "Power Paradox" and "Flagellation and Fundamentalism," elegant work on Peshawar women's utilization of participation in Muharram rituals for self-expression and empowerment; and Torab's "Piety as Gendered Agency," an analysis of how Iranian women use prayer meetings to transform gender constructs. For discussions of the limits and expectations of gendered activism, see Sondra Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996); and Peteet, *Gender in Crisis*.

63. This is not to say that both women's participation in the community and the example set by Zaynab do not remain clearly bounded, in keeping with beliefs about the essential nature of women as nurturing. Yet when clarifying the different natures of the sexes, Lebanese Shi'i women always emphasized that different did not mean differently valued. They actively espoused gender equity (*'adala*) as opposed to gender equality (*masawa*), with the former term embracing difference and the latter entailing "sameness." In doing so, they promoted feminist interpretations of Islam that emphasized what Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), calls the "ethical egalitarianism" of Islam. See also Annabelle Böttcher, "Im Schatten des Ayatollahs: Schiitische Feministische Theologie in Libanon am Anfang" ("In the Shadow of the Ayatollah: Shii Feminist Theology in Lebanon at the Beginning"), *Neue Zuericher Zeitung*, 7 March 2001, 5.

For both women and men, living authenticated Ashura by striving to embody the qualities and examples set by Zaynab and Husayn has become a crucial aspect of piety in this community. Demonstrating one's sense of social responsibility and solidarity and one's understanding of the values represented in Ashura is critical before self, others, and God. From a ritual emphasizing passive mourning and community identity based on shared oppression, Ashura has been transformed into a commemoration inspiring active engagement in bringing about social, political, and religious change. As this activist reminds us:

> In the *majalis* we become renewed, we are reminded. Society might be asleep, in deep sleep, and this school, these lessons enter them, and wake them up, say "get up, help others. Get up and see the corruption, get up and see the oppression, be careful of your society, take care of it, become aware of your society, of yourself, of other people, of your nation. See where your country is, it is occupied! See the people of the South how they are suffering, how people from all sects are fleeing, are being bombed, their homes are being destroyed. What is going to be your position with regards to this?" This is the school. This is Ashura.